



U.S. Department of Justice

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EVENT: Guilty Plea

Defendant: Wissam Salameh

DEARBORN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FOOD STAMP FRAUD

A 32-year-old Dearborn, Michigan resident pleaded guilty to committing over \$380,000 in federal food stamp fraud, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today.

Pleading guilty before U.S. District Judge David Lawson was Wissam Salameh, 32, of Dearborn, Michigan.

The fraud arose when Salameh, the manager of the BP gas station and convenience store located at 15880 Livernois in Detroit, owned by Duke's Oil Corporation, began the practice of discounting food stamp benefits for cash. The food stamp recipients would provide their electronic benefit transfer cards, which are like credit cards, at the convenience store and the defendant would enter a certain amount of charges, for example \$100, as authorized purchases of food items, but provide \$75 in cash to the recipient instead. Food stamp benefits are to be used only for eligible food products. During the 20 month period of April 2003 through December 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funds the food stamp program, calculated the total of fraudulent food stamp transactions conducted at the Livernois BP station to be \$383,000.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy stated that, "The food stamp program guarantees that the most needy in our community will be able to buy basic food necessities, not only for themselves, but for their families to survive. Profiting off food stamps by cashing them for less than face value is taking basic food money away from the poor and is a fraud upon the taxpayers who fund this family assistance program. The public's confidence in the food stamp program should not be undermined by those who abuse it. Offenders who violate the food stamp laws will be prosecuted."

The count to which defendant pleaded guilty, carries a maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Salameh's sentencing is scheduled for February 7, 2007 at 2 p.m.

The investigation of this case has been conducted by Special Agent Mark McClutche of the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ross I. MacKenzie.